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ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to improve the social skills of targeted third-graders. The problem of students exhibiting a lack of social skills was documented by means of student discipline referrals, anecdotal records, and teacher surveys. Evidence indicated that students failed to solve conflicts in positive manners, were unable to work cooperatively in groups, and demonstrated off-task behaviors. Interventions included increased instructional emphasis on cooperative learning, direct instruction in social skills, and direct instruction in conflict resolution. Post-intervention data indicated improvement in students' social skills, reflected in students' ability to work together, resolve conflicts in positive manners, and decrease off-task behaviors. (Six appendices include project handouts and questionnaires. Contains 22 references.) (Author/EV)

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USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SOCIAL SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

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This report describes a program to improve students' social skills. The targeted population consisted of third grade students located in a community in northwestern Illinois. The problem of students exhibiting a lack of social skills had been documented by student discipline referrals, anecdotal records, and teacher surveys.

Evidence of the problem of a lack of social skills revealed that students failed to solve conflicts in positive manners, were unable to work cooperatively in a group, and demonstrated off task behaviors.

A review of solution strategies, together with analysis of the problem statement resulted in the selection of the following interventions: increased instructional emphasis on cooperative learning, direct instruction in social skills, and direct instruction in conflict resolution.

Post intervention data indicated improvement in students' social skills. These skills were reflected in the students' ability to work together, resolve conflicts in positive manners, and decrease off task behaviors.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted third grade classes exhibited a lack of social skills that interfered with social interaction. Evidence of the existence of the problem included student discipline referrals, anecdotal records, and teacher surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted school had a total population of 342 students enrolled in kindergarten through 4th grade. Of these students, 39.5% were considered low income, and 10.8% had English as their second language. The racial and ethnic makeup of the school was 66.7% Caucasian, 11.4% African American, 20.8% Mexican-American, and 1.2% Asian.

The school's attendance rate was 96.1%. The school had a mobility rate of 18.1%. The chronic truancy rate was 1.8%.

The school faculty consisted of one administrator, 25 certified positions, and 13 noncertified positions. Of these, 36 were Caucasian, and 3 were Mexican-American. There were 36 females and 3 males. The average number years of teaching experience for certified faculty was 13.7 years. Faculty members with master's degrees numbered 13, and one faculty member had a doctorate.

The school building was located on two acres of land surrounded by a residential area. The building was built in 1953, with additional classrooms added in 1954 and 1970, which brought the total square footage up to 37,450 square feet. The school was a single story structure, housing 19 classrooms, a gym, and a library. A cafeteria and three of the classrooms were located in the basement. There was one classroom contained within a mobile unit. Butterfly and prairie gardens provided outdoor education laboratories for the school.

The average class size was 23.7 students. Of the total students, 18% received special education services in one of three self-contained classrooms or a resource room. Incorporating a Regular Education Initiative (REI), the school provided some special education services by mainstreaming students into regular classrooms. Of the total student population, 23% received Title I services. An after school reading program servicing 30 students in first through third grades provided additional reading opportunities for at risk students. The school also housed a self-contained gifted program as well as a pull out program that served 7% of the students. A Limited English Proficiency program provided support for non-native speakers. A full time certified speech pathologist serviced language difficulties not related to English as a Second Language. Two teachers participated in a second and third grade loop.

Behavior at the school was addressed with a school wide discipline plan that utilized a daily assignment planner. All students grades 1 – 4 were instructed in conflict resolution, with third and fourth grade students being trained as peer mediators. A half time school counselor worked with both individual pupils and student groups, and was available for consultation with teachers.

An outside agency provided before and after school care. The local branch of Junior Achievement, the hospital, and the public library also worked with the school. The past two school referendums failed to pass. Change to a year round calendar was investigated and proposed by faculty and parents. Although interest in a year round calendar was high, financial constraints made the district unable to facilitate the project at that time.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted school district was located in the northwestern part of the state approximately 150 miles from a large metropolitan area. The city served a population of 20,000 people. Of this total, 49.4 % were male, and 50.6% were female. According to the U.S. Department of Census, within this population, there were 83.2% Caucasian, 10.1% African American, 9.5% Mexican-Americans, 1.1% Asian or Pacific Island, and 0.3% other.

There were 8,051 households in this community. Of the total households, 62.6% were owner occupied; the remaining 37.4% were renter occupied. There were 2.36 people per household. The number of households with school aged children were 3,653, and 891 families were headed by a single female parent.

The average household income in this community was $24,746. The average family income was $31,449, and the average non-family household income was $14,777. The average family income for the community was $3,337 less than the average for the county. Of the population, 16.3% were classified below poverty level and 6.6% were unemployed.

The number of employed persons over 16 years of age was 8,977. Of those employed, 22.3% worked in manufacturing, 25.6% in wholesale and retail, and 19.8% in professional services. Major employers in the area included John Deere, Rock Island Arsenal, ALCOA, Trinity Medical Center, and CASE/IH.

Of the 13,300 people over the age of 25 years, 9.6% had less than a 9th grade education, 29.9% had a high school diploma, and 5.41% had completed some college, but had no degree. Those with associate's degrees represented 18.1%, those with bachelor's degrees 10.7%, and graduate and professional degrees 26.3%. Higher education opportunities in the surrounding area included three trade and technical schools, two community colleges, one four-year college, three universities, one graduate center, and one chiropractic college.

The community was located between two rivers in a bi-state area. The larger river, the Mississippi, provided economic opportunities to the community. Additional factors contributed to the composition of the community. In recent years, there had been an increase in the Spanish speaking population. A state correctional facility was located in the community. Neighboring city councils explored merging their cities to promote economic development.

The targeted district supported four grade school buildings, one fifth grade campus and one sixth - eighth grade campus. The total district enrollment was 2,598 students. Of this population, 69% were Caucasian, 12.8% were African American, 16.4% were Mexican-American, 1.6% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.3% were Native American. The percent of low income students was 40.7, with 5.7% of the

students having limited English proficiency. The district attendance rate was 30.0%, and the truancy rate was 2.8%.

A total of 174 teachers were employed in the targeted district. Of those, 14.4% were male, and 85.6% were female. The ethnicity of the teaching staff was 94.8% Caucasian, 2.3% African American, 1.7% Mexican-American, and 1.2% Asian or Pacific Islander. The average years of experience were 16.3, and 39.5% had a master's degree or above.

The targeted district was one of five public elementary school districts which fed into the community's single high school. The high school and grade schools were separate unit districts, each with their own administration and board of education.

The district had a seven member board of education which met biweekly to discuss issues related to education and financial matters. The district had developed educational partnerships with a variety of local businesses and organizations, as well as with higher

education institutions in order to support high school and adult literacy programs for the community.

National Context of the Problem

The lack of social skills interfering with student interaction has generated concern at the state and national levels. This deficit interferes with learning, contributes to behavior problems in the classroom, and interferes with classroom management.

Students' learning is negatively affected by a lack of social skills. Because of the deficiency in social skills, students spend less time on task and the learning environment is disrupted (Manning & Lucking, 1991).

The lack of social skills has a detrimental effect on the students' behavior. Educators are concerned with the number of inappropriate verbal and physical interactions among students. These include things such as tattling, invading others' space, talking out, laughing at others, and rude remarks (Cook & Rudin, 1997).

The inability to solve social problems interferes with classroom management. Poor student interaction limits the effectiveness of working together to reach a goal. The inability to self-monitor affects the noise level in the classroom, distracting all learners (Jordan & Le Metais, 1997).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1990), students do not have the innate capability to interact effectively with others. Inadequate social skills interfering with positive social interaction in our schools is a nationwide concern. The lack of social skills interferes with learning and increased incidents of problem behaviors disrupt classroom management.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The targeted third grade students demonstrated behaviors that interfered with their interpersonal relationships. The existence of the problem was documented through student discipline referrals to the principal, teacher anecdotal records consisting of communication with parents in students' daily planners, and teacher surveys.

Researchers collected discipline referrals of targeted third graders for the year 1998-99. Referrals consisted of serious classroom behavior problems and infractions during supervised recess times which included a 10 minute period before the start of school, a 15 minute morning recess, and lunch period. Anecdotal records were documented from teacher narratives on detention slips. Teachers were surveyed at the beginning of the 1999-00 school year to identify possible behavior trends.

Of the 79 students in the targeted group, 33 students were referred to the office for behavior infractions. The researchers identified seven problem behavior categories. A summary of the categories and number of incidents is included in Table 1.

Table 1

Total Number of Students and Incidents During 1998-99

Behavior Category	Incidents	Students	Percents
Physical Aggression			
Physical Contact	51	23	29%
Weapons	3	3	3%
Verbal Aggression			
Disrespectful Language	15	9	11%
Inappropriate Language	13	6	8%
Excessive Noise	34	8	10%
Task Related Behaviors			
Not Following Directions	67	30	38%
Homework/Incomplete Work	7	4	5%

Of the 190 incidents recorded during the 1998-99 school year, 45% were chronic behavior offenders. Any student referred to the principal over four times was considered chronic. The behavior categories of "physical contact" and "not following directions" not only had the highest number of incidents, but also involved the largest number of students. Three suspensions were given according to district policy.

Anecdotal records were reviewed by researchers. According to the school discipline plan, a detention was issued following three inappropriate behavior stamps within a one week period. Eighteen students in the target group received a total of 40 detentions. Because documentation of specific behaviors resulting in detention was vague, a more detailed checklist was developed by the researchers.

At the beginning of the 1999-00 school year faculty were surveyed to indicate how often behaviors interfered with a positive classroom environment. Behaviors were divided into three categories: interpersonal, task completion, and intrapersonal. The results of this survey are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher Survey on Student Behavior

Question	Almost Never	Seldom	Often	Almost Always
Interpersonal				
Able to join group appropriately	0	2	8	2
Listen and accept others' ideas	0	3	7	2
Reach consensus	0	1	8	2
Listen and understand	1	3	6	1
Task Completion				
	0	3	5	3
Follow instructions	0	3	6	2
Stay on task				
Intrapersonal				
Express feelings appropriately	0	2	7	3
Resolve conflicts appropriately	0	2	7	3
Accept consequences	0	2	7	3

The majority of responses indicated that students had difficulties in all three areas at nearly equal levels. Teachers reported that task related behaviors interfered slightly less often than those in the interpersonal or intrapersonal categories.

Probable Causes

The researchers identified three probable causes for the documented problem behaviors: negative society models including more tolerated violence, lack of family

support, and weak interpersonal skills.

Teacher researchers found that negative models in society influenced students' behavior. Television violence, video games, and acceptance of unsportsmanlike conduct at athletic events contributed to the problem. The negative models in society promoted resolving problems with violence.

In recent years, many families moved into the area because a family member was incarcerated at the local prison. In addition to these members being viewed as inappropriate role models, their absence contributed to the lack of family support for the student. The general change in family structures often left students unsupervised and provided little guidance as to appropriate behaviors.

Because of the lack of direct instruction in social skills, students were not able to develop strong interpersonal relationships. Although a conflict resolution program was used at the school, it was not consistently integrated into the curriculum by all teachers, and little transfer was realized in the classroom.

Berreth and Berman (1997) identified the desensitization of young people to violence as a contributing cause of a "challenging social environment." Students are desensitized by violence and do not recognize their own feelings and the feelings of others. Gest, Witkin, Hetter, and Wright, (as cited by Roper, 1998) stated that the Children's Defense Fund (1997) reported an increase in juvenile gun violence. In a ten-year period from 1982 to 1992, the incidents of teenagers ages 13 to 15 arrested for murder nearly doubled, from 390 murders to 740 murders. Berreth and Berman (1997) described children as "mirrors," reflecting society's values. Reactionary violent behaviors can occur when children's needs are not met. The material culture easily

seduces children by promoting instant gratification. Many violence prevention programs lacked a component dealing with character development.

Garbarino (1997) stated that the disruption of family relationships created emotional and behavioral problems which caused a "socially toxic" environment. Garbarino cited studies that showed a 50% decrease over the past 30 years in the amount of time parents spend engaged in constructive activities with their children. It was easy for children to succumb to the negative influences of society because of the lack of time spent with adults.

One of the basic problems teachers faced was dealing with disciplinary problems in the classroom. According to Hansen (1998) problems in today's classrooms reflected the adult behaviors in society. Examples were: increased homicides in children under 17 years of age, lack of discipline, and drug abuse. Educators traditionally handled these problems reactively with punishments instead of in a proactive manner stressing positive and negative consequences. Parents, school, and society often failed to expect children to accept responsibility for behaviors. As children mature, there must be a growing ability to accept the consequences for behavior. Growth can not occur if the child is self-centered and does not understand the cause and effect relationship of their actions. "Teaching for consequences encourages students to realize what they decide to do matters" (Hansen 1998, p. 20).

After reviewing available literature, the researchers at the targeted school found the following causes of students' inappropriate behavior: desensitization of students to violence, the disruption of family relationships, and the failure of students to accept consequences for their behavior.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Researchers conducted a study of available literature related to student behaviors that interfered with social interaction. They identified and categorized probable strategies for developing positive interpersonal relationships. Researchers designated three strategies as a focus for literature review: direct instruction of social skills, conflict resolution, and cooperative learning. The terms of each were defined, skills for each were examined, and a plan for implementation of selected strategies was developed.

Morgan and Jensen (1988) define social skills as "interpersonal behaviors that allow an individual to interact with others successfully" (p. 245). Social skills include verbal and nonverbal behaviors used to facilitate positive communicate with others. There is little agreement about the prescribed way to determine which social skills should be taught. Therefore, key social skills are identified through literature study, researching existing social skills programs, and analyzing skills children need to be successful in school.

Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) suggested that weak social skills be identified during the first month or quarter of the school year. These skills should be age appropriate and

based on individual classroom need. Examples of social skills at the elementary level might include: using six inch voices, listening to your neighbor, staying with group, looking at the speaker, and not hurting feelings.

Social skills are essential for successful functioning in society. According to MacMullin (as cited in Jordan and LeMetais, 1997) social skills enable students to get along well with one another. The lack of social skills contributes to student misbehavior. Improving social skills reduces misbehavior and increases students' time on task. Johnson and Johnson (1990) stated that people with strong interpersonal skills are employable, productive, and successful in the work force. Among those skills desired by employers are interpersonal and decision-making skills, responsibility, verbal communication, and initiative. In 1982, the Center for Public Resources found that 90% of people fired from jobs were fired for "poor job attitudes, poor interpersonal relationships, and inappropriate behavior" (Johnson and Johnson, 1990, p. 32).

Children learn social behaviors through life experiences. Learned behaviors can be positive or negative, depending on the available models. "People do not know instinctively how to interact effectively with others. Nor do interpersonal and group skills magically appear when they are needed. Students must be taught these skills and be motivated to use them" (Johnson and Johnson, 1990, p. 30).

Johnson and Johnson (1990) list five steps for direct instruction of social skills. First, students must think the skill is important. Then, students must understand the skill and when to use it. Third, students need to practice the skill until it is mastered. Fourth, students must reflect on their use of the skill. Finally, students must practice the skills on an ongoing basis. Systematic instruction needs to be considered as important as

instruction in content areas. If educators follow the steps of direct instruction of social skills, they provide tools for lifelong success in academic achievement, employment, and interpersonal relationships.

Morgan and Jensen (1988) conducted extensive research on direct instruction of social skills. They determined that the most effective instructional practices included six steps. First, identify and give a rationale for the specific skill. Second, model the behavior. Third, teach the concept through use of examples of the skill. Fourth, role play and practice the targeted skill. Fifth, coach students by providing verbal feedback on behaviors. Sixth, provide positive reinforcement. Generalization is the goal of direct skill instruction. In order for children to transfer the learned skills to situations outside of the classroom, the skills must be practiced and monitored on an ongoing basis.

In 1993, a project called "Raising Healthy Children," was designed by Cummings and Haggerty (1997). The intent of the project was that the instruction of social skills would strengthen relationships between student, family, and school, thus reducing the risk of behavior problems. This study, funded through the National Institute on Drug Abuse, focused on staff development. Through five workshop sessions, faculty was trained to teach social skills. One of the components of the training was direct instruction of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. This training included practice, reinforcement, and generalization of skills. After two years preliminary results showed positive effects on students' interactions with others, on attitudes toward school, and on academic achievement.

Begun and Begun (1995) promoted an early intervention model to reduce the incidents of unacceptable social behavior. This model required direct and systematic

teaching of social skills. The prekindergarten through twelfth grade curriculum developed by educators and compiled by The Society for Prevention of Violence with The Center for Applied Research in Education consists of four basic components: modeling, role playing, discussion of performance, and use in real life situations. Each lesson has the eight steps that follow a direct instruction format. These steps are: establish need, introduce the concept, identify the component, model the skill, rehearse expected behavior, practice, independently use the behavior, and continue the behavior. The Society believes that early direct training in social skills will benefit students throughout their lives.

The literature supported the premise that social skills are most effectively learned through direct instruction. Educators can not assume that students have a background in positive interpersonal relationships. These skills are necessary for success, not only in the classroom situation, but also in society.

Another strategy to improve interpersonal relations is conflict resolution. Conflict is the difference of opinion. Students do not always resolve conflicts in a constructive way. An inordinate amount of time during the academic day is spent dealing with the effects of students' inability to resolve differences. Conflict may occur naturally when two or more people engage in verbal or nonverbal communication.

Michlowski (1999) defines three types of conflicts. Individuals can have conflicting goals, needs, or resources. When students have competing goals, clashes may occur because only one goal can be fulfilled. When two or more students want different things, a conflict of needs occurs. Availability of materials can cause a conflict of

resources. These three types of conflict can be handled in constructive or destructive ways.

Many students are unable to positively solve problems, and choose destructive ways to resolve differences. Children who experience violence and anger at home on a regular basis, begin to accept it as a normal response. Roper (1998) questioned whether inability to cope with stress and anger led to an increase in violent behaviors. She found that students who were unable to express anger at home for fear of violent repercussions, displaced those feelings on unsuspecting others outside the home. Students were able to vent anger at school because they felt confident that consequences would not be abusive. This anger can take the form of aggression. Angry students may attempt to manipulate people in situations using intimidation.

According to the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (as cited by Michlowski, 1999) conflict resolution programs in the schools have increased from 50 to 5,000 since the National Association for Mediation in Education was founded in 1984. "As it continues to grow in acceptance, conflict resolution may yet become the fourth R in basic education" (Michlowski, 1999, p. 108).

Michlowski (1999) stated that individuals must understand the nature and causes of conflict and develop ways to manage it effectively. Michlowski declared that instructing students in conflict resolution facilitates a win-win environment. Individuals who used conflict resolution strategies were empowered. Glasser (1992) defined power as one of the five basic needs of all human beings. "The objectives of conflict-resolution and peer-mediation programs are to teach students self-responsibility and self-regulation while empowering them to act in socially approved ways" (Vatalaro, 1999, p. 115).

Vollmer, Drook, and Harned (1999) concluded that conflict resolution has developed as a successful way to help students to constructively reach agreement. The structure by which children could communicate was provided by a conflict resolution process. The authors found that experience and training were necessary to master the skills needed to handle social conflict. When provided with a repertoire of constructive behavior choices, students were afforded the skills needed to acknowledge others' feelings and viewpoints. This enabled them to solve problems in a socially acceptable manner.

Vollmer, Drook, and Harned (1999) described a formalized program for developing conflict resolution strategies. The Conflict and Resolution Education Program (CARE), created by Pittsburgh's Falk Laboratory School, was implemented in grades kindergarten through eight. Teachers received instruction in the basic components of the program, then guided students through the steps of conflict resolution, and provided opportunities for students to role play and practice the process. As a result of the program, teachers indicated that students accepted responsibility for their actions and became independent in resolution of conflict. Students also showed growth in collaborative skills. By using mediation, individuals acquired tools necessary for effective communication.

From her research on conflict resolution, Michlowski (1999) generalized five findings. Program objectives included training students to handle conflict in constructive ways, and transfer the knowledge for use outside of the classroom. The researcher reported that students learned how to communicate more effectively, resolve problems

more timely, discipline referrals decreased, students had more positive peer relationships, and students' attitudes about school improved.

Michlowski (1999) noted five techniques successful in teaching conflict resolution. The use of role playing incorporates drama as a teaching tool, and gives students the opportunity to verbalize alternative solutions to problems. Another technique is storytelling, which allows students to identify possible outcomes to a fictional problem and reach consensus as to the best solution. Conflict games such as "Walk in the Shoes of Others" aid students in seeing others' perspectives. Humor is used to promote peaceful conflict resolution. Finally, mnemonics and metaphors can be used to teach conflict resolution. Associations are made to help students remember ways of handling problems.

These techniques draw on a variety of intelligences and expand students' choices for solving conflict.

Vatalaro (1999) believed schools reflect the types of problems found in society. Educators are forced to deal with overwhelming numbers of conflicts in a day, most beginning as small tensions and escalating to confrontations because they are left unresolved.

Traditional programs teach students that authority figures are needed to solve conflicts and there is a winner and a loser. As a result, students often employ avoidance and confrontation as acceptable ways to solve clashes with others. Students who have been taught resolution skills are able to solve disagreements in a proactive manner using communication. This gives the student power over the situation, allowing them to voice their feelings, and create a win-win situation. Peer mediation is the involvement of a

neutral third party to help disputants when an impasse has been reached. Mediators encourage students to utilize conflict resolution strategies and permits students to solve differences peacefully and independent of authority figures.

Johnson and Johnson (1975) designated four steps to resolve controversy. The first step is for students to identify the conflict as a problem solving situation. The second step is to depersonalize the conflict and focus on the problem, not the person. The third step is to look at all sides of the problem and brainstorm possible solutions. The fourth step asks students to reverse roles in order to see the problem from other person's point of view, and then choose the best solution.

Not all literature supported the conflict resolution process as the best method to deal with problem solving. Bereth and Berman (1997) determined that conflict resolution programs are incomplete. They stated that conflict resolution is only one part of developing a moral school environment. In addition to conflict resolution, there must be a focus on character development through teaching skills of empathy and self-discipline.

Carpenter (1998) took an authoritarian view for controlling student behavior. He stated that conflict resolution programs had little effect with students who knew they could win through the use of violence. Students needed to learn that the consequences for wrong doing were always more unpleasant than the rewards for misbehavior. Carpenter's approach is seen by the researchers as being punitive and reactive.

After reviewing the literature, the researchers concluded that conflict resolution presents a positive method for dealing with interpersonal problems. U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno (as cited by Vollmer, Drook, and Harned, 1999) acknowledged that

the current juvenile justice system is starting too late when it comes to dealing with our youth. She encourages governments to emphasize proactive measures, such as character education and conflict resolution, on an equal basis with other academic programs.

The cooperative learning process is another vehicle for teachers to use in developing and reinforcing social skills. Slavin (1995) defined the cooperative learning process as students working in teams to master material. Teachers may use a wide variety of teaching methods from quite informal to very structured. Cooperative groups can be configured in a variety of ways and shaped to meet specific purposes. Individual responsibility may change according to the requirements of the task.

Johnson and Johnson (as cited by Bellanca and Fogarty, 1992) stated there are five necessary characteristics for cooperative group work. They were adamant in maintaining that all five characteristics must be included for the cooperative learning process to be present. Small heterogeneous groups provide students with face-to-face interaction, which fosters positive interdependence. Each group member has individual accountability for the success of the group and for task mastery. Cooperative social skills must be directly taught and monitored. Students are encouraged to assist one another in accomplishing specific goals to encourage positive interdependence. This would be characterized by assigned roles and the administration of group rewards. Finally, through group processing, participants reflect on how they work together as a group and identify ways to improve. Teachers must remember to use these five elements to ensure that they are using cooperative learning.

Slavin (1995) noted that research on cooperative learning had been done as early as the 1920s. In the 1970s, independent groups began developing specific methods of

incorporating cooperative learning in the classroom. Today extensive research can be found on methods used in cooperative learning.

Johns Hopkins University developed Student Team Learning methods which incorporate cooperative work, but also emphasize the ideas of team goals and team success. These are achieved only if all team members master the concept being taught. Student Team Learning is based on the following three concepts. First, individual team member contributions are measured against their own past performance (Equal Opportunities for Success). Second, teammates work to prepare all group members for evaluations (Individual Accountability). Third, rewards are given to any team meeting or exceeding the designated criterion (Team Rewards) (Slavin, 1995).

Three Student Team Learning methods were developed for general classroom use. These included Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD), Jigsaw II, and Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT). Two additional methods were total curricula programs designed for specific areas of study. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) was a reading and language arts curriculum designed for grades 2 - 8, and Team Accelerated Instructions (TAI) was developed for math instruction in grades 3 - 6 (Slavin, 1995).

In STAD heterogeneous groups of four work to master material presented by the teacher. The group work is followed by individual quizzes. Individual quiz scores are compared to past averages and team points are assigned based on the improvement of each individual member. Students are motivated by the idea of team rewards and work to help others learn. Because points are awarded based on improvement over past

performance, low achievers as well as high achievers help their team be successful (Slavin, 1995).

First developed by David DeVries and Keith Edwards,TGT is similar to STAD in the initial presentation and study of concepts. They differ in that evaluation takes the form of a weekly tournament where children from homogeneous groups compete against each other in academic games. The fun and excitement of the games was a motivating factor for many teachers and students (Slavin, 1995).

In Jigsaw II, adapted from Elliot Aronson (1978), each team member is designated to be an expert on a particular segment of the total assignment. Following the study of assigned sections, students meet and discuss with others who have studied the same topic. The four member heterogeneous groups reconvene to present and discuss what each has learned.

An individualized program of math instruction was designed to provide for the sequential development of skills needed in this area. In TAI, (Slavin, Leavey, and Madden, 1986) students are placed in the sequence according to the concepts they have mastered. Though team members work on different units, they are responsible to each other for managing materials and for checking each others' work. Team rewards are given based on homework completion, the number of units completed, and the performance on unit tests.

In the CIRC program (Madden, Slavin, and Stevens, 1986) students work in pairs within their teams. These reading teams are comprised of students from two or more different reading levels. The reading material may be literature or basal selections. Reading pairs engage in a variety of activities based on their readings. Writer's

Workshop activities are the basis for the language arts component of the curriculum.

There are various approaches to cooperative learning. Individual teachers must determine which of the many cooperative learning process models will meet the needs of their particular classroom and objectives.

Jordan and LeMetais (1997) conducted a ten week study because of their concern over student misbehaviors due to lack of social skills. Cooperative learning was chosen because research indicated the process facilitates the improvement of social skills.

The study was conducted with a fifth and sixth grade class of 26 students. The researchers targeted the following social skills: sharing and taking turns, suggesting and brainstorming, working and making decisions in a group, respecting other ideas and opinions, negotiating, and including others. The class was first given a pretest to determine baseline information. Cooperative learning lessons were then implemented. Reflection time was provided at the end of each lesson for evaluation.

Results showed the teacher's role changed from one of authority to that of learner, sharing in the classroom experience. Students were able to respect opinions of others and became more involved in a team approach to task completion. Social skills improved as indicated by more collaboration and more on task behavior.

Traditional teaching methods, according to Manning and Lucking (1991), foster competition creating a win-lose environment. In cooperative learning, students are encouraged to work together rather than competing as individuals. The cooperative learning process can improve social skills, self esteem, and academic achievement. Johnson and Johnson (1978) noted the benefits of cooperative learning included an acceptance of differences such as ethnicity, gender, and individual limitations.

Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1990) stated that using cooperative learning in the classroom encourages communication, sharing, and working together toward common goals. Implementing cooperative learning has the "...potential to transform classrooms, schools, and ultimately, society, by creating communities of caring and support, which in turn, engender high levels of achievement in many domains" (p. 63).

Literature supported the use of direct instruction of social skills, conflict resolution, and cooperative learning to improve students' ability to interact appropriately. Teacher researchers intended to examine the impact on students' behavior through implementation of these three interventions.

OBJECTIVES AND PROCESSES

1. As a result of increased instructional emphasis on cooperative learning during the period of September 1999 through January 2000, the third grade students from the targeted classes will increase their ability to work together as measured by student surveys, teacher observation checklists, and anecdotal records.

PROCESSES:

Develop lesson plans focusing on using cooperative skills.
Locate materials needed for cooperative lessons.
Set up a schedule to teach cooperative learning skills and strategies.
Create surveys and observations checklist.

2. As a result of direct instruction in conflict resolution during the period of September 1999 through January 2000, the third grade students from two targeted classes will increase their ability to solve conflicts in positive manners as measured by teacher observation checklists, number of detentions, and disciplinary referrals.

PROCESSES:

Develop lesson plans focusing on social skills needed for conflict resolution.
Schedule common class time for direct instruction of social skills.
Design teacher observations checklist.

3. As a result of direct instruction in social skills during the period of September 1999 through January 2000, the third grade students from two targeted classes will decrease off task behaviors as measured by teacher observation checklists, inappropriate behavior stamps, and anecdotal records.

PROCESSES:

Develop lesson plans focusing on social skills such as listening and following directions.
Schedule common class time for direct instruction of social skills.
Design teacher observations checklist.

Project Action Plan

I. Data collection for evidence of problem

A. Disciplinary referrals (from 1998 - 99 school year)
B. Anecdotal records (from 1998-99 school year)
C. Teacher survey

II. Implementation of Program

A. WEEK ONE

1. Conflict Resolution
   a. Lesson one: Define conflict and three ways to handle conflict
   b. Lesson two: Cooling off activity

B. WEEK TWO

1. Conflict Resolution
   a. Review: Conflict and cool down strategies
   b. Lesson three: Long term ways to make us feel healthy and calm
   c. Lesson four: How to talk about feelings and "I" messages
   d. Lesson five: Listening skills and role playing
   e. Lesson six: Paraphrasing and role playing
   f. Review: Review and practice skills

C. WEEK THREE

1. Cooperation Theme

   a. Lesson one: Team building activity
      PMI
      T-Chart of cooperation

D. WEEKS FOUR - SIX

1. Cooperation Theme

   a. Cooperative Skills Lessons

      Lesson two: Use six-inch voices
      Lesson three: Listen to your neighbor

Lesson four: Stay with your group
Lesson five: Look at the speaker
Lesson six: Don't hurt feelings
Lesson seven: Reach a consensus

2. Review of conflict resolution skills

E. WEEK SEVEN

1. Cooperation Theme

a. Lesson eight: Define and practice roles of cooperative learning:

Recorder
Materials Manager
Director
Speaker

F. WEEK EIGHT

1. Cooperation Theme

a. Review cooperative learning skills and roles
b. Lesson nine: Cooperative learning activity - cooperative sculpture

G. WEEK NINE

1. Cooperation Theme

a. Lesson ten: "Cooperation leads to a sweet ending" - students cooperate to write letter requesting ingredients for trail mix
b. Lesson eleven: Make trail mix

H. WEEK TEN

1. Review - cooperative learning skills

I. WEEK ELEVEN

1. Responsibility Theme

a. Lesson one - Following directions

J. WEEK TWELVE

1. Responsibility Theme

a. Lesson two - Completing a task

K. WEEK THIRTEEN

1. Responsibility Theme

a. Lesson three - Being trustworthy

L. WEEK FOURTEEN

1. Responsibility Theme

a. Lesson four - Accepting consequences

M. WEEK FIFTEEN

1. Review Responsibility Theme

III. METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

A. Teacher checklists (ongoing throughout implementation)

B. Disciplinary referrals

C. Student surveys

D. Anecdotal records

E. Number of Inappropriate Behavior Stamps

Methods of Assessment

To evaluate the results of the intervention, researchers collected data on the number and types of behavior referrals and detentions. In addition, student reflections, teacher anecdotal records, and observation checklists will be kept throughout the intervention.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The action research project had three objectives for the third grade students of the targeted elementary school. The first objective was to increase students' ability to work together as measured by student surveys, teacher observation checklists, and anecdotal records. The processes used to implement the objective included developing lesson plans and locating materials for lessons that focused on cooperative skills. Other processes included setting up a schedule to teach cooperative learning skills and strategies, and creating surveys and observations checklists.

The second objective was to increase students' ability to resolve conflicts in positive manners. Direct instruction was used to teach conflict resolution strategies. Behaviors were measured by teacher observation checklists and anecdotal records. The strategies used to implement this objective included developing lesson plans focusing on social skills needed, scheduling common instructional time, and designing teacher observation checklists.

The third objective as measured by teacher observation checklists, inappropriate behavior stamps, and anecdotal records, was to decrease off task behaviors. The

processes used to implement this objective included creating lesson plans focusing on social skills such as listening and following directions. Common class time for direct instruction was scheduled, and teacher observation checklists (Appendix A) were designed.

The school year began with a change in leadership. Principals in the four elementary buildings in the district were reassigned. This changed the overall climate of the building. The rearrangement affected the project in several ways, particularly in the documentation of referrals. No written record was made of inappropriate playground or lunchroom behaviors. As a result, insufficient data were collected to draw meaningful conclusions on office referrals.

During the first week of the implementation of the action research plan, various administrative tasks were completed. Teacher surveys (Appendix B) were conducted in order to develop base line data. Students targeted to participate in the project were also surveyed (Appendix C). Parent letters (Appendix D) were sent home to inform parents about the project.

For the first two weeks of the project, 79 third grade students received direct instruction in conflict resolution. Mediation report forms (Appendix E) were used to record problem behaviors at recess. At the end of this training, only two classes, involving 48 students, were targeted for total program implementation. The remaining students were divided into twelve groups of four.

The action research project was delayed for two weeks because of a district decision to add a third grade section at the targeted building. The project was put on hold to address the emotional needs of the students during the transition. The teachers

were responsible for planning the transfer of students and materials. A total of 32 students remained in the target classrooms. Students were then randomly placed into new cooperative groups.

The theme of cooperation was ongoing for the next five weeks. Skills were directly taught during two half-hour sessions each week. Team building activities led students to the development of T-charts on skills necessary for successful cooperation. These were posted in each classroom and directly taught during the following week. The skills were reinforced throughout the remainder of the project. Upon completing each activity, students were asked to reflect on what was positive, negative, and interesting about their experiences.

The next step was to define and practice the roles of cooperative learning. Over a period of four weeks, various activities were designed to instruct students in how to use those roles to function as a team. Individual and group evaluations (Appendix F) were completed by students to evaluate and reflect on how the students and their groups utilized the skills.

Responsibility was the theme for the last five weeks of the project. During this time, conflict resolution and social skills were reinforced. The responsibility theme focused on following directions, completing a task, being trustworthy, and accepting consequences. Posters listing the four components of responsibility were displayed in each class. During this time period, various graphic organizers were used to reinforce and reflect on concepts, students documented responsibility at home, and two speakers presented on the topic of accepting consequences. The student survey (Appendix C) was readministered to assess any changes in attitudes.

During the implementation period, one of the target classrooms experienced a 30% mobility rate. The lack of training was evident in new students even though there was an ongoing review of skills.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The effects of using cooperative learning to improve social skills through the interventions of direct instruction of social skills, conflict resolution, and cooperative learning were assessed with various methods. Student behavior checklists were used to document change during the period of the project. Data from the students in the form of a survey were collected. Conflict mediation reports were gathered to document behaviors during recess.

The effects of the interventions used to improve behavior were assessed by analyzing student behavior checklists. A weekly tally of discipline incidents was maintained throughout the intervention. These data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Behavior Checklist of Targeted Students

	Number of Incidents	Number of Students	Percent of Students
Physical Aggression			
Physical Contact	12	8	25
Weapons	0	0	0
Verbal Aggression			
Disrespectful Language	2	2	6
Inappropriate Language	5	3	9
Excessive Noise	43	15	47
Task Related Behaviors			
Not Following Directions	201	24	75
Homework/Incomplete Work	60	20	63

Data show highest number of student behavior incidents were task related. Seventy-five percent of students experienced difficulty following directions. During the project implementation period 63% of targeted students failed to complete work. These two behaviors comprised 81% of the documented behaviors. Twenty-five percent of the student population were involved in physical aggression.

Upon comparing Table 1 with Table 3, researchers found task related behaviors continued to be the highest number of behavior incidents. Physical contact remained the second most frequently documented behavior despite the decrease in number of incidents. The percentage of students involved did not change significantly.

Student researchers used student behavior checklist data to compare behaviors during the first four weeks and last four weeks of the implementation period. These

results are shown in table 4.

Table 4

Comparison of Incidents of Student Behaviors

	September	December
Physical Aggression		
Physical Contact	4	0
Weapons	0	0
Verbal Aggression		
Disrespectful Language	1	0
Inappropriate Language	0	0
Excessive Noise	11	9
Task Related Behaviors		
Not Following Directions	96	36
Homework/Incomplete Work	20	23

The intervention of direct instruction of social skills appears to have been effective in decreasing targeted behaviors. Between September and December there was a 62% decrease in inability to follow directions. The percentage of incidents of failure to complete work increased by 15%. There were no incidents of physical aggression recorded in December.

Student researchers also assessed the target attitudes before and after the interventions using a student attitude survey. Table 5 reflects these results.

Table 5

Survey of Change in Students' Attitudes

Skills	September		January	
	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Cooperate with Others				
Yes	71	74%	60	71%
No	13	14%	3	4%
Unsure	12	12%	21	25%
Complete Tasks				
Yes	44	69%	38	68%
No	18	28%	3	5%
Unsure	2	3%	15	27%
Resolve Conflicts				
Yes	69	72%	59	70%
No	19	20%	11	13%
Unsure	8	8%	14	17%

Questions on the survey were grouped to reflect the target students competency in three social skills areas. Survey questions two, six, and seven reflected attitudes toward cooperation. Task completion was assessed in questions three and four. Conflict resolution skills were targeted in questions one, five, and eight.

In all skill areas the positive response showed a slight decline. Negative responses toward cooperation and conflict resolution exhibited a minimal decline. Negative responses related to task completion decreased from 28% in September to 5% in January.

Researchers noted unsure responses increased in all areas. The largest increase

was realized in the area of task completion.

Conflict mediation reports were used as another method of assessment. A total of 28 mediation reports were filed the period of implementation. A total of seven reports involved students in the targeted group. This reflects 25% of the total reports. All reports involved verbal conflicts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of data on student behavior checklists, the students showed a marked improvement in behavior. The social skills used during direct instruction of cooperative learning and conflict resolution appear to have been generalized. These skills learned and practiced in base groups facilitated student time-on- task. Students became aware of personal and interpersonal work habits.

Interpersonal relationships improved considerably. The implementation of conflict resolution afforded the students options to solve problems without the use of physical aggression. Direct instruction of social skills during the cooperation theme made students aware of appropriate interpersonal skills. Students developed mutual respect within their base groups which in time transferred to other situations within the school setting.

Students' ability to follow directions dramatically improved. This is because students understood the components and behaviors needed to complete a task successfully. Through projects and team activities, students practiced skills. As a result, students spent more time engaged in their work.

Despite the improvement in ability to follow directions, there was a slight increase in the number of incidents of incomplete work. The increase was due to several

factors. One factor was the high number of move-in students who did not receive direct instruction or the opportunity to practice the skills learned by the target group. A second factor was as the school year progressed, the difficulty level and amount of homework increased. Finally, as work complexity increased, some students did not have the ability to understand or complete tasks independently.

Teacher researchers found that practice and review of social skills must be ongoing in order to maintain positive behaviors. Without regular review, the amount of teacher time and energy spent intervening in student disputes increased. New students were at a particular disadvantage because of a lack of background knowledge and experience.

Throughout the action research project, students learned to reflect on their experiences. Students became more introspective, which accounted for the increase in the percentage of students who marked "unsure" in the January attitude survey. This level of honest reflection was an unexpected, positive effect of the interventions.

Upon completion of the action plan, student researchers concluded the implementation of the three interventions was successful. The direct instruction of social skills, conflict resolution, and cooperative learning have had a positive effect on student behavior. The positive impact shown through this action research indicates most students would benefit from the interventions and strategies. It is recommended that direct instruction of social skills be initiated school-wide.

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Third Grade Behavior Checklist - Teacher _____ for the week of _____

	Physical Aggression	Verbal Aggression			Task Related Behaviors		Other		Stamps	Detentions
Student Number	Physical Contact	Disrespectful Language	Inappropriate Language	Excessive Noise	Off task Behaviors	Not Following Rules	Late Homework	Other		
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										
16										
17										
18										
19										
20										
21										
22										
23										
24										
25										

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TEACHER SURVEY

Directions: How often do the behaviors interfere with positive classroom environment? Use the key and circle your response for each question as it applies to your class.

1=Almost never 2=Seldom 3= Often 4=Almost always

1.	Do students know and practice acceptable ways of joining an ongoing activity or group?	1	2	3	4
2.	Are students able to listen to and accept others' ideas?	1	2	3	4
3.	Are students able to reach a consensus in an appropriate manner?	1	2	3	4
4.	Do students appear to listen when someone is speaking and make an effort to understand what is said?	1	2	3	4
5.	Do students understand instructions and follow them?	1	2	3	4
6.	Do students remain on task to completion?	1	2	3	4
7.	Do students express feelings in an appropriate way?	1	2	3	4
8.	Do students act in appropriate ways when faced with a negative situation?	1	2	3	4
9.	Do students accept consequences of behaviors without becoming defensive or upset?	1	2	3	4

Student Questionnaire

Circle your grade: 1 2 3 4 5 6

Circle your answers for questions 1-8

1. I know our school rules and I follow them.	Yes	No	?
2. I listen when others speak.	Yes	No	?
3. I complete my work on time.	Yes	No	?
4. I do my best work.	Yes	No	?
5. I am treated fairly at this school.	Yes	No	?
6. The children in my class are friendly.	Yes	No	?
7 I am good at working with other children.	Yes	No	?
8. When I have a problem I know I can ask for help to solve it.	Yes	No	?

August 26, 1999

Dear Family,

Welcome back. Hopefully everyone had an enjoyable summer. We have plans for a great school year! There will be many changes and new experiences for your child.

In an effort to promote positive behaviors and relationships, our third grade classrooms will focus on activities that develop cooperation, appropriate social skills and positive conflict resolution. We may record some of our activities on video tape or in pictures. We hope the results of these efforts will be a classroom environment of educational growth, respect and cooperation.

Please feel free to call with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
The 3rd grade teachers

Mediator Report Form

Date:_____

Conflict Mediators: _____

_____

1/2 grade recess_____
3rd grade lunch _____
4th grade lunch _____
1st grade lunch _____
2nd grade lunch _____
3/4 grade recess_____

Disputants: _____

_____

What kind of conflict? ____ **Argument** ___ **Name calling** ___ **Rumor**
____ **Other:**_____

How did you find out about it? ___ **student** ___ **teacher** ___ **yourself**
___ **playground aide**

BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS	***#1***	***#2***
1. _____	___	___
2. _____	___	___
3. _____	___	___
4. _____	___	___
5. _____	___	___

PLAN: ***(Do they need to figure out who goes first? When to do their plan? etc.)***

_____

_____

Was the conflict resolved? ____ **Yes** ____ **No**

Teacher Evaluation

I saw your group

☺☹ doing your jobs.

☺☹ working together to solve problems.

☺☹ using quiet voices.

☺☹ staying together until all jobs were done.

Comments:

Adapted from Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc. 1993.

Teacher Evaluation

I saw your group

☺☹ doing your jobs.

☺☹ working together to solve problems.

☺☹ using quiet voices.

☺☹ staying together until all jobs were done.

Comments:

Adapted from Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc. 1993.